

## Currituck Banks Reserve

COROLLA, NC

### Rules & Tips For Visitors

- The reserve is open to visitors year round.
- Visit at your own risk. The site is remote and conditions can include natural hazards such as insects, poisonous plants, and venomous snakes.
- Off-leash pets are prohibited.
- Fires, fireworks, target shooting, nudity, and camping are prohibited.
- Recreational biking and horseback riding are prohibited.
- Producing noise that is disruptive to wildlife or other visitors is prohibited.
- Removal or disturbance of plants, animals, fungi, or cultural resources is prohibited.
- Littering is prohibited.
- Leaving any personal property unattended within the boundaries longer than 24 hours is prohibited.
- Hunting is allowed by permit during designated hunting season. Both hunters and visitors should use appropriate caution.
- Recreational/off-road motorized vehicles are prohibited.
- Written authorization is required for organized events, commercial activities, and other special activities.
- It is unlawful to intentionally come within 50 feet of a wild horse.

**For the most up to date rules and guidance visit:** [deq.nc.gov/reserve-rules](http://deq.nc.gov/reserve-rules)

### North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve

[deq.nc.gov/ncreserve](http://deq.nc.gov/ncreserve)



The Currituck Banks Reserve is managed by through a federal-state partnership between NOAA and the N.C. Division of Coastal Management to protect the site's ecosystems for research, education, and compatible traditional uses. The support and ongoing stewardship of the site by a community of partner organizations is gratefully acknowledged. This site is also a Dedicated State Nature Preserve.

The North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve is a part of the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, a division of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality.



*When you have finished with this publication, please consider sharing it with a friend, returning it, or recycling it.*



2500 copies of this document were printed at a cost of \$766.50 or approximately \$0.31 per copy.

2025

### Natural Features of Currituck Banks

This unique area is a relatively undisturbed crosssection of a barrier island between the Atlantic Ocean and the nearly fresh waters of Currituck Sound.

#### Creation of the Reserve

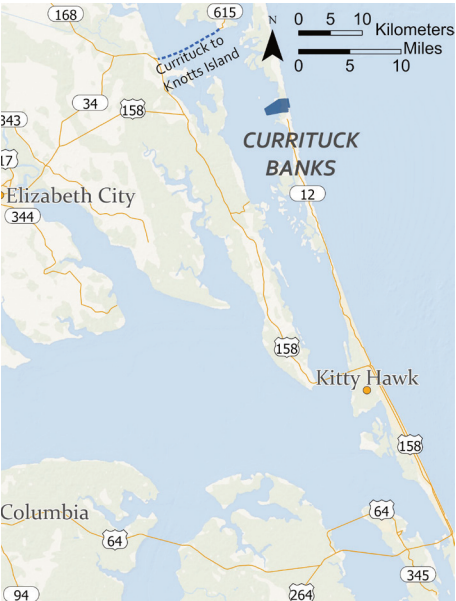
In 1982 the state received its first federal award toward the establishment of the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR) to ensure the preservation of vital coastal systems for research and education. Properties in the northern, central and southern coast were selected to become components of NCNERR. In 1985, NOAA and the N.C. Division of Coastal Management dedicated this site as one of the original components.

#### Purpose of the Reserve

This natural area is one of 10 sites that make up the North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve. Preservation of the Currituck Banks Reserve allows this coastal ecosystem to be available as a natural outdoor laboratory where scientists, students and the general public can learn about coastal processes, functions and influences that shape and sustain the coastal area. Traditional uses, including recreation, are allowed as long as they do not disturb the environment or organisms or interfere with research and educational activities.

### Visitor Information

#### How to Find Us



The Currituck Banks Reserve is just north of the village of Corolla in Currituck County, N.C. The site can be reached by car and boat. Two walking trails exist at the southern portion of the reserve, off N.C. 12. The northern portion is reached only by four-wheel drive along the beach corridor, after N.C. 12 terminates at the beach access ramp. The nearest boat ramp is next to Currituck Lighthouse in Corolla.

#### Access:

A 0.3-mile handicap accessible boardwalk begins at the parking lot and leads through maritime forest to view Currituck Sound. A 1.5-mile primitive trail departs from the boardwalk and heads north, also passing through maritime forest and looping near Currituck Sound. Use of the parking lot is for reserve visitors only. There is a two-hour time limit. Violators will be ticketed and/or towed.

#### Parking:

Beware of biting insects (flies, mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers), and poisonous plants (poison ivy). Sun protection is advised.

#### Facilities:

Public restrooms are available at the Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education located in Heritage Park, just south of Currituck Lighthouse in Corolla.

#### General:

Please stay on designated trails and and leave only your footprints.

# Currituck Banks Reserve

## Unique Features

Relatively pristine habitats support a great diversity of plants and animals in this remote reserve. Historically, Currituck Sound has switched between a saltwater environment and a freshwater environment, depending on the presence of ocean inlet openings in the barrier landform. The mature maritime deciduous forest within the reserve boundaries is one of the rarest habitat types on the East Coast.

## Physical Setting

The reserve is located on Currituck Banks, a solid barrier spit that extends 70 miles from Virginia Beach to Oregon Inlet, N.C. The reserve has 721 acres of estuary habitats and 244 acres of upland habitats. Currituck Sound has slowly changed from saltwater to nearly freshwater since the last inlet along Currituck Banks closed in 1828. The closest ocean inlet is more than 60 miles from this part of Currituck Sound. Because of this, the water level around the reserve is affected more by wind currents than by the regular lunar tides.

## Marsh and Estuary Habitats

Open waters of Currituck Sound are shallow and contain low amounts of dissolved salts. Vegetation that can grow in this subtidal (always submerged) habitat includes widgeon grass, pondweed, wild celery, and milfoil. These underwater plants are examples of submerged aquatic vegetation, or SAV. Tidal flats of mud and sand are sometimes exposed during irregular low tides that are driven by the wind. These flats are home to many worms, snails, clams, and crabs. The shoreward edge of the flats are fringed by intertidal (sometimes underwater) marshes. A mix of black needlerush, giant cordgrass, cattails, and duck potato grows in these low-salt marsh areas.

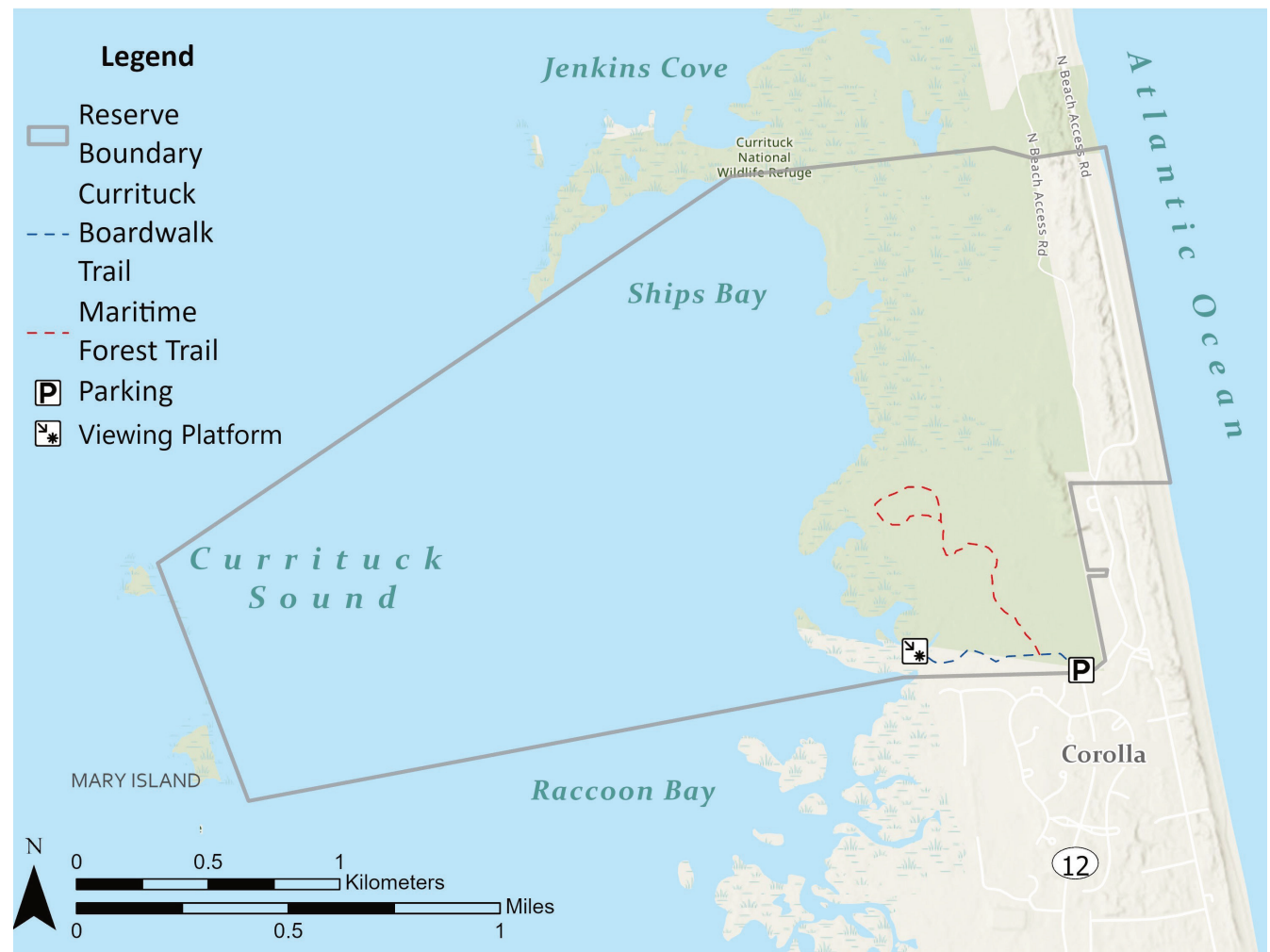
## Upland Habitats

The boardwalk and trail pass through a mosaic of maritime forest communities and seasonal wetlands. Higher elevations support a maritime evergreen/deciduous forest habitat with loblolly pine, live oak, persimmon, and high brush blueberry. The lower elevations have maritime swamp forest habitats. They include red maple, sweet gum, and various ferns. Interspersed among the forest communities are freshwater wetlands and ponds containing cattail, lizard's tail, pickerelweed, and several types of rushes. A nearly impenetrable zone of wax myrtle, yaupon holly, and stunted oaks forms a shrub thicket habitat just west of the beach dunes. Dune vegetation includes sea oats, American beach grass, sea elder, and sea rocket.

## Fishes and Aquatic Animals

The unique physical setting of Currituck Banks allows saltwater and freshwater fish species to thrive in the low-salt waters of Currituck Sound.

Saltwater species include speckled trout, flounder, red drum, mullet, and striped bass. Freshwater species such as



largemouth bass, sunfish, crappie, perch, and several species of catfish are common recreational fisheries. Blue crab and American eel are important members of the aquatic community. Juvenile eels, called elvers, are a large component in the diet of many predatory fish such as striped and largemouth bass.

## Mammals

Upland areas support white-tailed deer, eastern gray squirrel, cottontail and marsh rabbit, opossum, raccoon, gray fox, and bobcat. Muskrat, river otter, and the invasive species nutria inhabit the marshes and creeks. Feral hogs and horses are non-native mammals that utilize the habitats within the reserve boundary.

## Birds

The diverse habitats in the reserve host many resident and seasonal bird species. Gulls, terns, and pelicans live in colonies on beach and dune areas. Plovers and sandpipers stab at the wet sand for food in the beach swash zone. Songbirds, owls, hawks, and bald eagles use the forest and adjacent estuary habitats. Marsh and estuary habitats support herons, egrets, rails, and belted kingfisher.

## Amphibians and Reptiles

The Currituck Banks Reserve supports habitat for both freshwater and sea turtles, including the endangered leatherback and threatened loggerhead sea turtles.

Common amphibians in the forest and freshwater wetland habitats include tree frogs, carolina anoles, southern leopard frog, and narrow-mouthed toad.